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ABSTRACT

This speech discusses several of the exemplary dropout prevention programs sponsored by the Office of Education. The basis of all the programs, whether they be for dropouts from school or for dropouts from life, is that once people find out that there is work to be done in the world, and that they will be welcomed and rewarded for doing it, they apply themselves to learning what must be mastered. The hardest task these programs face is to convince untrained people who have experienced nothing but failure that there is a place where they are needed and wanted, and that they can make a place for themselves in the world. Special recognition is given to the O.I.C. which received a grant from the Office of Education to provide work-study opportunities for future black businessmen. (PC)

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LEARNING TO WORK -- OR WORKING TO LEARN?*

T. H. Bell
U.S. Commissioner of Education

I have been talking a lot about work lately -- and this may strike you as odd, coming from a Commissioner of Education. In the past, Commissioners of Education -- myself too often among them, I fear -- have tended to dwell upon things like accreditation and new institutions and have used a lot of highflown language to describe the wonderful ways in which these were enhancing our civilization.

Learned discourse was appropriate for other times, but right now we in education have more pressing problems. We have to consider the work future of the one million young people between the ages of 15 and 19 who dropped out of high school in 1974. We must add to this one million the millions from other years who have dropped out of school or out of society itself.

Many of these young people will get a job and hold it for a while. A great many more will not. Their numbers will form the backbone of an undisciplined and under-educated mass of people that we have to worry about, for without basic skills they will not understand the complex ideas of our time. They could form the nucleus of a mob that might eventually do violence to our whole way of life.

You of the OIC know these people well and have actually shown us new and untraditional ways of reaching them. The Reverend Leon M. Sullivan, your founder, developed OIC because he realized that the civil rights movement was not enough, that to open up job opportunities was of no value if the people who needed a job were not prepared to take it.

So you in OIC supplied an impetus, with the help of the community, to people who had lost hope of finding work or who needed skills and the support of others to get started.

I understand that your pioneer work is in action in 100 cities in the United States and that it has spread to Africa and Latin America; that you have educated and trained more than 200,000 people and placed more than 120,000 of them in jobs, and that the job preparation you offer includes more than 60 vocational skills as well as basic education.

This is an impressive record, but I am not here today to tell you what you already know. Rather, I am here to speak of some of the things we in the Office of Education are trying to do and some of the hopeful signs we see ahead.

Why do young people drop out? Some of the answers are obvious. Things at home are difficult; money is needed, and the young person somehow thinks that it will be easy to get a job. Or perhaps the

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youngster isn't doing well in school, and dropping out seems logical and easy. Perhaps, on the other hand, the dropout is just very bright and very bored; he or she thinks it would be more fun to read a favorite subject in the library or to explore the world on foot.

What is more often the case, the dropout may be just a very angry person, someone who sees the world and everyone in it as the enemy. This hostility is understandable among young people in low income urban settings, where every entry to the good things of life seems blocked.

The Office of Education has had a small exemplary Dropout Prevention unit which developed 19 innovative projects. The projects ran out of funds last June 30, but projects in dropout prevention will be funded again in 1975.

At first many of the projects attempted only to upgrade the quality of instruction in reading and mathematics and to expand services in guidance, social work, and health training.

Later on there was work to change the attitudes of teachers so that children would achieve better self-images and the confidence to persist in their studies. Parents were involved in many ways to help prevent their children from dropping out. In Tuskegee, Alabama, for instance, the parents were paid to comb the city and help bring youngsters back into school.

Project Outreach, launched in Sheridan, Colorado, by the Dropout Prevention Program in 1971, set itself the job of reaching and holding potential dropouts. The young staff decided to set the goal of generating "internal fate control" among the young people...that is, a feeling of confidence that one can change one's life. To give students a real feeling of control over their fate, after preliminary work the project's leaders turn responsibility for decision making within the project over to the students.

At first decision making was a chore and a hassle for the students; it was difficult for them to accept democratically the many differing points of view and work out a consensus, but this has now been whipped.

Much of the success of Project Outreach is due to the breakdown of traditional student-teacher barriers and a relaxation of the stress caused by fear of failure.

No grades are given by Project Outreach, and much anxiety is thereby lifted from the youngsters. As time went on, tolerance to stress was built up within the students so that they became ready to learn. In accepting authority and learning to cope with anxiety, the students of Project Outreach become interested in school as they gain insights into their own ways of feeling and thinking, their defenses and ability to cope.

The dropout rate for Project Outreach went down within a year from 15 percent to 5 percent. There was also considerable reduction in the absentee rate and in low grades for students, with considerable improvement in student attitudes toward school, authority, and the environment.

Another exemplary dropout prevention program, Project STAY, in St. Louis, concentrates on the work-study idea, focusing primarily upon the needs of those students who plan to go to work full time after graduation from high school. STAY recognizes that schools in general fail to provide students--and especially dropouts--with a salable skill, that the important thing is to provide each student with a skill with a high potential for job success. The experience of success is the most important single factor in the development of a dropout or potential dropout. Once the young person finds he can succeed, his attempts at further self-development and study, and higher aspirations, will follow.

Project STAY has 11 categories of work programs. These include tie-ins with commercial firms like McGraw-Hill and Sinclair Oil and range through many skills and services. Students are paid for working up to 15 hours per week, working half time and studying half time.

I am sure that much of what I am saying is familiar to you in OIC, especially in connection with the work of your own Urban Career Education program in Philadelphia's Germantown High School and 17 schools in that neighborhood. We are proud in the Office of Education to have made a contribution to that effort, and we watch with interest the development of its components of career orientation, the community program that includes work with parents, and the intern program that works directly with and through real or potential dropouts in innovative ways.

Since there tend to be more potential as well as real dropouts among those in low income areas, it follows that the Office of Education has greater concern for blacks among the dropout-prone since blacks form the majority of those on low income levels. When we are asked what we are doing for blacks specifically, we can point with some pride to several series of programs aimed at helping youngsters and families lift themselves to higher aspiration and income.

Many of these programs--though of course not all--are in the Bureau of Occupational and Adult Education and are concerned with career and vocational guidance both for young people in school and for adults who find themselves without skills. All of the programs try to help both young and old with incentives to learn such basic skills as reading, writing, and figuring along with specific job skills and the setting of personal goals.

The basis of all these programs--whether we speak of those for dropouts from school or for dropouts from life--is that, once people find out that there is work to be done in the world, and that they will be welcomed to do it and rewarded for doing it, they apply themselves to

learning what must be mastered. The hardest thing is to convince untrained people who have experienced nothing but failure that there is a place where they are needed and wanted, and that when they reach that place they will see that the world is neither friendly nor unfriendly but a place where each makes his or her own world...given half a chance.

One way of making one's own world is to have one's own business. The Office of Education is proud to have committed $3.5 million to OIC over the period of 1971-74 for education and training for minority business entrepreneurs.

The inspiration behind the grant to OIC began when Elliot Richardson was Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare and called for a task force on education and training for minority business enterprise. Office of Education officials provided the prime leadership for the task force.

The task force identified the training needs for minority businessmen. Then an inter-agency group, joined by 40 members of the public, representing a wide range of occupations, set out to find ways to convince blacks that being a businessman and eventually owning a business was something they could do successfully. It seems strange that the United States, the country that has always been symbolized by the Businessman, should have a large group of people too turned off to want to go into business and become bosses.

However, the task force succeeded in drawing up a concept paper to motivate young people into thinking of business as a fine career. Right here in Atlanta, Littlejohn Associates has a contract to train black Atlantans in the art of going into business.

The idea of work combined with study is not only an important way to prevent dropping out. It is considered by many leading educators to be crucial to the education of <u>all</u> young people in our present society. Jerome Bruner urges that "we test achievement outside the context of school, that we treat the process of mastering the culture's devices and disciplines, its tools, as a communal undertaking."

Work-study and cooperative eudcation, of course, are the two classic approaches to combining education and a job. They differ somewhat.

In a study made for the Office of Education of 50 out of a representative 500 work-study programs, it was found that their goal is to keep students in school. They do this by providing the students with financial assistance, and they try to improve disadvantaged young people's attitudes toward school and work.

Cooperative programs, on the other hand, usually deal with specific occupational training. Since coop students usually have an idea of what they want to do, and do not need to be motivated by others to do it, fewer cooperative programs are used in dropout prevention programs. This does not mean, however, that they are never to be used in this way.

Specific job-related instruction makes job placement easier after the course is finished. Students work harder and give more to a job when they know it is related to a career they have chosen. Coop jobs tend to require a higher degree of responsibility and offer greater satisfaction to the student .

A recommendation of the study was that work-study dropout prevention programs be expanded and require employers to offer students these alternatives:

1. Permit the student to work and train at a specific occupation, without pay. This plan would open many more occupations to training and would require changes in present legislation.

2. Permit students to explore different occupational areas by rotating them among employers and arranging for each student to have different duties at each job site. This would not offer occupational training in depth, but it would offer the student a chance to taste job alternatives.

Many of the techniques and findings I have mentioned today are well known to you. What we are really talking about is survival training--teaching both young and old to swim with the tide of fast-moving modern life, rather than against it.

Few individuals in the modern world have been able to swim against that tide and survive. A few have had great dreams that carried them and somehow protected them. But most of us must conform and work within the society before we can bring a private dream to fruition.

Dr. Sullivan has been successful and happy in furthering a private dream that is shared by many in the Office of Education--and we wish him continued success.

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